

Frequently asked questions

Improvement Science Fellowships

Updated: 18 April 2016

NOTE: All applications to the Improvement Science Fellowships have to be submitted through our new online application portal [AIMS.health.org.uk](https://aims.health.org.uk). We advise all potential applicants to familiarise themselves AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE with the application process. The process is outlined in section four of this FAQ document as well as in the [AIMS user manual](#).

Background

1. What is the Health Foundation?

The Health Foundation is an independent charity committed to bringing about better health and health care for people in the UK. Our aim is a healthier population, supported by high quality health care that can be equitably accessed. We learn what works to make people's lives healthier and improve the health care system. From giving grants to those working at the front line to carrying out research and policy analysis, we shine a light on how to make successful change happen. We make links between the knowledge we gain from working with those delivering health and health care and our research and analysis. Our aspiration is to create a virtuous circle, using what we know works on the ground to inform effective policymaking and vice versa. We believe good health and health care are key to a flourishing society. Through sharing what we learn, collaborating with others and building people's skills and knowledge, we aim to make a difference and contribute to a healthier population. Further details about the organisation can be found at www.health.org.uk.

2. Has the Health Foundation funded other research fellowships?

Yes. This is the fourth round of the Health Foundation Improvement Science Fellowships. In addition, the Foundation funds a wide range of leadership development fellowships for people working in the health service, as well as our Clinician Scientist Fellowships, which focus on biomedical research. The Improvement Science Fellowships build on the knowledge and experience we have gained from these programmes. For more information, please visit <http://www.health.org.uk/programmes/improvement-science-fellowships>

3. What are the aims of the Improvement Science programme?

The Improvement Science programme aims to develop the field of enquiry and practice of improvement in health care, with the fellowship scheme specifically contributing to developing the future leaders in the field. Improvement science aims to develop tools, concepts and methods, so that approaches to improvement in healthcare are more evidence-based and thus more robust to enable widespread implementation.

4. Why does the Health Foundation include leadership development in its fellowship offer?

The Health Foundation recognises that for improvement activity to be effective and sustainable, leadership is required at every level. As our specific aim is to develop and equip the future leaders in the field, we want to help fellows to become reflective about their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as understanding aspects of contextual, technical, relational and personal leadership qualities.

Eligibility

5. Do I need to have already obtained a PhD, professional doctorate or MD?

Yes, all applicants must be at the post-doctoral stage, able to demonstrate experience of leading research or practical implementation of improvement in health care, after completing their PhD, professional doctorate or MD studies.

Those awaiting confirmation of their qualification are not able to apply until the award is confirmed. We will consider any discipline that supports scientific efforts to improve health care, including a clinical or health-related subject, social sciences or appropriate broader scientific fields

6. Do I have to be working in a university now?

No, we expect that some applicants will be working in academic institutions, while others are currently working in the health service in a role which involves leading quality improvement or clinical practice with quality improvement. All applicants must have firm arrangements to conduct their research from a host academic institution if successful.

7. Is the Improvement Science Fellowship restricted to the UK?

Yes. The Health Foundation's work to improve the quality of health care is focussed on the UK and, as such, all fellows will need to be based at a UK university and research proposals will need to demonstrate how they have the potential to significantly impact on the quality, safety or value of health care services in the UK.

8. Can I apply as a working clinician?

Yes. We encourage applications from candidates who are clinically trained and who want to apply their learning from clinical practice to carry out research in the field of improvement science. Clinician applicants will need to demonstrate experience of improvement in practice and the desire to undertake academically-based research for the period of the fellowship. Clinician applicants will still need a PhD or MD in order to apply. The Health Foundation will be flexible in respect of arrangements which enable continuing part-time work as a clinician and the Fellowship will be funded to match salary on a pro-rata basis.

9. How experienced do I have to be?

Successful applicants will demonstrate a track record in academic research, related to theory, methods or evaluation of approaches to improve the quality, safety and value of healthcare, supported by publication on these topics. This may be complemented by experience of implementation of improvement within health care services. Very experienced applicants, for example someone who already holds a professorship, will need to demonstrate how the fellowship will enable them to re-focus their work in order to make a significant contribution to the development of improvement science.

10. Do I already need to have secured research grants to be able to apply?

No, although any research awards you may have won are indicators of your success to date and you should list these in your application.

11. If I have already won a research grant, does this mean I cannot apply for an Improvement Science Fellowship?

No. But you will need to show that what the Health Foundation will be funding (in terms of the research bid, the leadership development aspect and your time overall) is distinctively different from any other research funding you already hold and how you will balance the work involved. The Health Foundation will be very concerned that we are not 'double-funding' if your post is already funded through an existing award.

Research proposal and host institution

12. Do I need to have a fully developed research proposal?

Yes, you will need to have identified a clear need for research that will significantly add to the appropriate body of literature, and to be proposing a programme of research with potential to significantly improve the quality, safety or value of healthcare services, that would be seen as credible, both in terms of theoretical approach and the plans for implementation.

13. If other funders are considering a similar research proposal to that which I have submitted, can I still apply?

Yes. You will need to inform us immediately if you are successful with other funders.

14. Do I need to have obtained ethical approval for my proposed research?

No, not at the time of application. Your proposal needs to include a robust plan for gaining the necessary approvals in line with national guidance, related to the appropriate body to approach and to have allowed the necessary time for this in your implementation plan.

15. Does my host institution have to be a centre of excellence in improvement science?

Yes. The Health Foundation wants to ensure that Fellows are studying in institutions that will effectively support their research into improvement science and that this will fit within a broader programme of research that is seeking to build the evidence to improve the quality, safety and value of healthcare. You will need to identify a suitably qualified academic supervisor and gain the support of those who are experts in improvement science. Your research needs to be aligned with the ethos and research priorities of your host institution.

16. Do I need to have agreements in place with a local NHS trust?

An important aspect of successful research projects will be their amenability for implementation to improve the quality, safety or value of healthcare, so it will be important to have an outline plan for implementation which, depending on the focus of your research, may involve working closely with NHS organisations. You will need to demonstrate that you have thought through practical issues like this and that you will have the necessary support from your host organisation and appropriate links with NHS organisations.

17. To what extent does the research have to be multi-disciplinary?

Research proposals will need to demonstrate appreciation of the multi-disciplinary nature of improvement science. So, while your work may be situated in psychology or nursing, for example, you need to think broadly about how other disciplines, such as statistics or operational research, for example, may contribute to the work and how you would access the necessary expertise. In addition, proposals will be assessed on the ability of the approaches being explored to impact on a wide range of healthcare settings.

18. Will research proposals with a clinical focus be acceptable?

Improvement Science Fellowships will not support research focussed on the development of new treatments. Proposals will need to be broadly-based, focussed on methods to improve the delivery of services, the patient's experience, the safety, or value of the service and to be capable of implementation in practice during the three year period of the fellowship. While research may be set within a specific clinical setting, such as diabetes care,

adolescent mental health or dementia services, the approaches to be explored need to include transferable learning to other settings, demonstrating the capacity to significantly impact on the overall quality, safety and value of healthcare.

Programme elements

19. What kind of leadership development will I be required to undertake as part of the fellowship?

This will include a number of elements:

- Two-day learning sets, roughly every quarter, led by experienced coaches/facilitators, exploring aspects of leadership for improvement and developing yourself as a reflective practitioner with the other fellows
- Attending regular cross-cohort learning events
- Telephone coaching sessions
- Ad-hoc meetings with leading academics and practitioners in improvement science in order to gain insights on the development of the field and specific input and guidance appropriate to your specific research
- Various learning opportunities designed specifically to meet your needs, including supported attendance at key seminars related to improvement science.

20. What is the nature of the relationship with the Health Foundation?

The Health Foundation is the funder of the fellowships. Fellows will be titled 'Health Foundation Improvement Science Fellow' and fellowships will be promoted through the Foundation's website to include your personal profile, photograph and an outline of your research. The connection with the Health Foundation enables Fellows to benefit from our networks to provide greater opportunities to present their research and to join collaborative work with other leading researchers. In addition, as the new improvement research institute becomes established over the course of 2017, Fellows will also be supported by the faculty of the institute, who will provide a mentoring network. Over time, it is envisaged that the institute will take over the administration of the fellowship grants.

21. What is the maximum amount of grant I can apply for?

The grant will cover your salary, including any annual increments (if applicable) and the direct costs of carrying out your research. All applications will be assessed with regard to value for money and the justification for all the items included as costs.

22. What costs can be included as 'research costs'?

You should include what you expect to be the items of direct expenditure required to carry out your research. Items commonly covered include: travel costs for you to attend the meetings related to the Fellowship, relevant conferences, data analysis support, transcription of interviews and focus groups, venue hire/refreshments for research meetings/focus groups, travel costs for patients and NHS staff to attend focus groups. You can include 'honorarium' payments for patient participants and some backfill payments for NHS staff to participate in specific research activities but not where this would constitute covering part of a salary for any length of time beyond a few days. Costs may cover some staff time from Research Assistants, but it is not possible to use the Fellowship to fund an additional salary. We do not expect improvement science research to involve laboratory costs. The Health Foundation will NOT pay any

overhead costs, full economic recovery costs, capital or equipment costs (other than small equipment within the lifecycle of the project).

23. What is the timing for the take-up of the fellowship?

Fellows will be selected through a development centre and interview panel in October/November 2016. The Health Foundation will be in touch with a draft award agreement for the selected applicants before the end of the year and the successful fellows will be announced in January 2017 and expected to commence the fellowship within the first quarter 2017, continuing through to the end of 2019/early 2020. Successful Fellows will be expected to attend an induction event to be held in Q1 2017.

24. Can this fellowship be part-time and how does this affect funding and timeframes?

Yes. It is possible to continue to carry out some other aspect of your role, such as part-time clinical practice, or continuing to input to organisational management or other on-going research projects, but you must be able to demonstrate that you have adequate time to undertake a significant research project within the three year timeframe and within a pro-rata salary budget. You must ensure that you can fully participate in the Fellows' leadership development programme. It will not be possible to fund a part-time fellow for longer than three years.

Application process

25. I've applied to the Health Foundation for funding before and have not had to use an online system. Can I submit a proposal any other way?

No, only applications submitted through our online application portal AIMS.health.org.uk will be considered for assessment. We ask that you familiarise yourself with the online application portal at an early stage of your application as we may not be able to respond to any technical queries in a timely fashion in the days prior to the deadline for applications. Please ensure that you have accessed all the key documents, which are this FAQ, the AIMS user manual, and the Improvement Science Fellowships supporting information document, all of which can be downloaded from www.health.org.uk/isf

26. Will you accept late applications?

No. The application deadline is 23.59 on 5 July 2016. After this time the online application system will automatically stop accepting submissions for this programme and we are unable to process applications submitted outside of the system.

27. Can I submit supplementary information, such as published articles or consultation papers, as an appendix?

No. In the interest of fairness, we discourage applicant from submitting applications of different volume and therefore no appendices are allowed. However, there is an opportunity for you to attach documentation directly relevant to your research proposal within the application form, for example a diagram or chart to explain your methodology. We will also require you to attach a declaration of support from your head of department. The template for this can be downloaded from the Health Foundation website (www.health.org.uk/isf). Please note that in all cases there is a restriction on the file type and size and we will disregard any attachments not **directly relevant** to your research proposal or application.

28. Should I apply as an individual or an organisation?

When using the online application portal, you must apply to the Improvement Science Fellowships as an **individual**, not an organisation. When starting the application process, you will be asked to first register as a user, when doing this ensure that you **do not tick** the 'with an organisation' box before you click 'register'. This is the only way to apply to the Improvement Science Fellowships. If you cannot find the scheme in the create application drop down menu, it will be because you are trying to create an application on behalf of an organisation rather than yourself as an individual.

29. I'm having technical problems accessing online system/completing the application form, who can I contact?

In the first instance please check that you have completed all the mandatory fields in the online form – it might be helpful to take a written note or screenshot of which questions require review before you re-enter the form. If this has not resolved your problem please refer to the AIMS user manual. If you continue to have a technical issue, eg problems with registering and logging in or confusing error messages, please email AIMS@health.org.uk and we will aim to reply within five working days.

If, however, you have queries about the actual programme or the application process which have not been answered in these FAQs, please email impsci@health.org.uk and we will aim to reply within five working days and, if appropriate, will also update the FAQs document.

The Improvement Science Fellowships is one of the first programmes to pilot the use of our new online application system. We are keen to hear about your experience of using the system in order to ensure that we can make any necessary improvements. To feedback on your experience, please send an email to AIMS@health.org.uk